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Answers to questions ... JPIC ...

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A Conversation with
Dr Preman Niles

ANSWERS

TO

QUESTIONS

that are often asked
about the JPIC process
or the conciliar process
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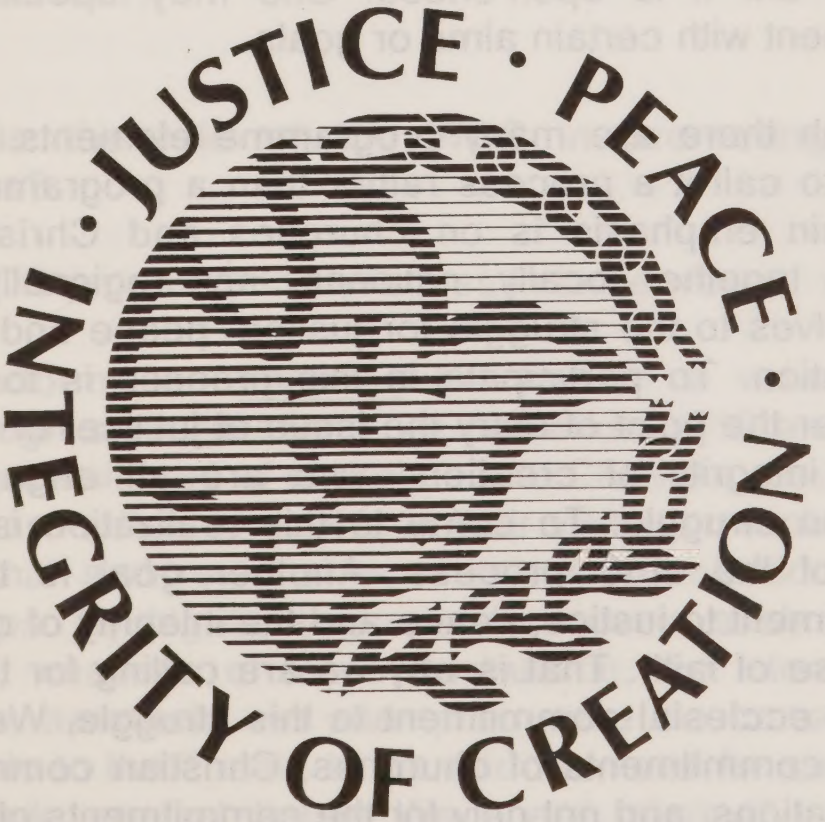
(covenant) for
Justice, Peace and the
Integrity of Creation



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Answers to questions that are often asked about the JPIC process or the concililar process of mutual commitment (covenant) for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

A Conversation with D. Preman Niles

1. **Why do you call JPIC a process rather than a programme? What is the difference?**

   A programme is an agreed plan of action or study that is worked out, usually from a central point, and then implemented. A process is something that goes on or is carried on. It is open-ended. One may speak of it as a movement with certain aims or goals.

   Although there are many programme elements in JPIC, we prefer to call it a process rather than a programme because the main emphasis is on churches and Christian groups coming together locally, nationally and regionally to commit themselves to the struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. To participate in this process is to realize that whatever the point of entry the issue of justice, or of peace, or of the integrity of creation - we are all engaged in one common struggle. To come to this realization is one of the goals of the JPIC process. Another goal is to view this commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation as a response of faith. That is why we are calling for the strongest form of ecclesial commitment to this struggle. We are asking for the commitments of churches, Christian communities and organizations, and not only for the commitments of individuals.

   In calling for these commitments as the goal or aim of the JPIC process, we ask certain specific questions:

- How is the struggle for justice, peace and the integrity of creation perceived in your situation?
- What are the commitments you have made or positions you have taken?
- What are the bases or grounds on which you have taken these positions?
- What is the community that has made this commitment?

More information on what the conciliar process of mutual commitment (covenant) to justice, peace and the integrity of creation means is available in a brochure published in English, French, German and Spanish. There is also a longer article "Covenanting for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation" in **The Ecumenical Review**, volume 39, Number 4 (October 1987).

2. **What is the role of the WCC in promoting this large process?**

The WCC promotes this process in three ways:

a) It performs an enabling function in a variety of ways. Through staff visitations, we talk about JPIC and encourage the commitment of churches and Christian groups. All WCC staff are asked to do this in their visits to member churches, national and regional ecumenical organizations and other groups. By highlighting specific issues, such as the arms race, weapons of mass destruction, the international debt crisis, apartheid, we attempt to raise the consciousness of people to the threats to life and the need for commitment to struggle against these. We share information on what is happening in JPIC world-wide, especially through our newsletter, "**Forum**". We also provide resource materials on JPIC.

b) The programmatic work of JPIC includes putting together ecumenical position papers, mostly from WCC sources, on the three facets or areas of a common struggle for life. These are discussion starters, to stimulate a dialogue between received ecumenical positions and other initiatives in the JPIC process. The document on **Peace** is already available; the one on **Justice** will be ready soon; and the one on the **Integrity of Creation** in March 1988. We will follow these up with study consultations to update the statements and to deepen them with greater theological reflection and with social, economic and political analyses.

c) The WCC programme sub-units provide resources and inputs for clarifying the concepts of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. They also reflect these perspectives and concerns in their programmes, and engage in common struggles with their programme partners - churches, councils, action groups, peace movements, lay centres and academies, etc.

3. **If this process works, there will be a plurality of responses to JPIC with much diversity, exhibiting national, regional and confessional priorities and characteristics. What is the relationship of the various initiatives in the JPIC process to the World Convocation on JPIC?**

We do not intend that there be an organized progression from national events to regional gatherings and finally to a world convocation. We expect many such events to take place, because JPIC calls for a broad movement of churches and Christians to commit themselves to the struggles for justice, peace and the integrity of creation in solidarity with others who are also in these struggles. We expect these commitments to be given visibility in JPIC events through confessions of faith and acts of commitment or covenanting which will express clear positions leading to specific courses of action. Each such event, therefore, is in a full sense a JPIC event that has validity and integrity in a particular context, and is not simply a preparation for a world convocation. We expect the

commitments and courses of action made in the various JPIC gatherings to continue beyond the World Convocation.

The World Convocation is essentially a gathering of churches seeking to speak with a common voice and to give a common witness on the contemporary issues of life. It will have its own process of preparation under the responsibility of a preparatory group, composed of representatives from the member churches of the WCC, regional ecumenical bodies, Christian World Communions, the Roman Catholic Church and other interested churches that are not members of the WCC, which will plan and call the World Convocation. This group will also include persons from Christian action groups and movements.

The World Convocation is expected to release a common statement on justice, peace and the integrity of creation, identify and speak to the critical issues and struggles in this area, and indicate courses of action for the churches. It will draw from the larger JPIC process and in turn encourage its continuance in the struggles for JPIC. Hence, the World Convocation should not be viewed as the culmination of a process, but rather as an extremely important step on the way that expresses the common mind of the churches at a particular point in a continuing JPIC process. The statements and the commitments that are made in the World Convocation will have to be received, owned and implemented by the churches.

4. **How will the plurality of diverse responses and the results of the larger JPIC process be harvested?**

It is clear that the insights, positions, forms of commitment and actions evident in the larger JPIC process will have to inform and shape the preparations for the World Convocation. Otherwise, these preparations will lack substance and concreteness.

It is difficult to be very precise in answering this question before we begin to see the responses. We will see more clearly when the preparatory group begins its work and faces this question itself. However, it is possible to point to two ways in which the input of the larger JPIC process could take place. First, those who are members of the preparatory group will themselves be involved in the larger JPIC process and will be able to speak about what is happening in their particular areas of involvement. Second, staff will also be gathering and collating the results of the various initiatives in the larger JPIC process and feeding these into the preparation for the World Convocation.

5. **The Vancouver call asking churches to commit themselves to the struggles for justice, peace and the integrity of creation speaks of the process of commitment as "a conciliar process". What does this mean?**

The brochure on the Vancouver call - to engage churches in a conciliar process of mutual commitment (covenant) to justice, peace and the integrity of creation - makes the following comments:

> Throughout its long history, from time to time, the church has met in councils to resolve disputes regarding the understanding and practice of the Christian faith and to take common positions regarding its mission - its responsibility to the world.
>
> Unfortunately, we are now in a divided situation of many churches, each with its own tradition. Each church has its own assembly, synod or council, so that a council of the whole church, in the strict sense of the word 'council', is not possible at present, but is rather a hope for the future.
>
> Yet, the Vancouver call invites us to come together again. It is based on a conviction that Christians and

churches can say and do important things together about justice, peace and the integrity of creation because we share a common faith in Jesus Christ - the Life of the World. It views the coming together for justice, peace and the integrity of creation as another important step in realizing the visible unity of the church.

This is a functional description of the term 'conciliar process' which interprets its use in relation to JPIC. It is not used in a theological or ecclesiological sense. For many churches, especially for those from Protestant traditions, this description is sufficient for the time being and is used, therefore, as shorthand for the full Vancouver call. The Roman Catholic Church prefers not to use this term because its use presupposes the calling of a council of the Church such as the Second Vatican Council. The Orthodox churches also prefer not to use this term lest it be confused with the great ecumenical councils of the Church. Neither of these meanings is meant in the WCC usage.

Whatever interpretation may be given to the term, all agree that participation in the JPIC process will have important consequences for discussions on the unity that we share and seek. Perhaps, after the World Convocation (not Council) on justice, peace and the integrity of creation, we will be able to say more on "conciliar process" not so much in terms of what it should mean as what it has meant.

6. **Peace and justice are familiar terms, but what is new about "the integrity of creation"?**

The term includes ecological and environmental issues, but goes beyond them. Its central thrust is on a caring attitude towards nature - an emphasis that is more evident in the German "Bewahrung der Schöpfung" and in the French "sauvegarde de la création". The English "integrity of creation" says more. It tries to bring together the issues of justice, peace and the environment by stressing the fact that there is an integrity or unity that is given in God's creation.

What this means will become clearer as we continue in the various struggles for life, and realize more fully that we live in an interdependent world of complex relationships and delicate balances. To realize, for instance, that justice for the poor and the hungry is tied up with the issue of justice for the land. To ignore the integrity of creation is finally to destroy all that sustains us. In essence, it is a call for a new life-style that is based on stewardship and compassion rather than on mastery and exploitation.

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